

or in exile. The modern State of Israel is no exception. Jerusalem is the seat of Israel's government: the site of parliament and its Supreme Court. Despite Palestinian claims to the contrary, Jerusalem has never been the capital of any other nation during the more than 3,000 years of its existence. The official recognition of this reality by Israel's closest ally is long overdue. It is not appropriate for the United States to choose the location of the capital of any nation nor is it the practice of the United States to do so anywhere else in the world.

#### SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

In 1995, The United States Congress passed the Jerusalem Embassy Relocation Act requiring the embassy to be moved to Jerusalem. This act was passed in the senate by a vote of 93 to 5 and the House of Representatives by a vote of 347 to 37. Since that time, President Clinton refused to move the embassy, using the excuse that it would harm America's National Security. Nevertheless, it must be noted that Americans vital security interests in the region are closely tied to the security of Israel and its Capital. These interests would be strengthened, not weakened, as a result of an embassy move. In stark contrast to the paternalistic approach of the Clinton Administration, George W. Bush, in December of 1999, speaking before the Republican Jewish Coalition, acknowledged that "A lasting peace will not happen if our government tries to make Israel conform to our vision of national security."

In *Navigating Through Turbulence: America and The Middle East in A New Century*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy's Presidential Study Group concluded that "[t]he top Middle East priority for the new President is to prevent a descent into regional war." The Report cites multiple scenarios for the current situation deteriorating into a wide scale conflict. While the scenarios differ in regard to course of events, they are all connected to the same general instability in the region, which has been greatly contributed to by the United States' failure to demonstrate the strength of its allegiance to Israel. Indeed, the Presidential Study Group's initial recommendation in averting a war is that:

The United States needs to ensure that Middle Easterners have no doubt about the strength, vitality and durability of the U.S.-Israeli strategic partnership, about America's willingness to strengthen Israel's deterrent, and about the U.S. commitment to provide political, diplomatic and material support to Israel. These objectives can be achieved through presidential statements, meetings with senior Israeli officials and acts that signal U.S. resolve and support.

The rationale behind the Report's suggestion is that such a course would silence those extreme Anti-Israel elements which view Israel's willingness to compromise as a sign of weakness; and America's "evenhandedness" as evidence that Israel can be defeated while America stays uninvolved to preserve its "evenhanded" diplomatic role. The Presidential Study Group concludes, however, that a showing of stronger American commitment to Israel would actually "strengthen the U.S. role as mediator in negotiations, which flows from—and is not antithetical to—the U.S. role as Israel's ally." Where equivocal support has served to embolden Israel's enemies, a showing of strength and absolute support for Israel will command respect and force a recognition that Israel cannot be defeated and that compromise is the only viable Arab option.

In light of the Clinton plan for Jerusalem, which President Clinton himself acknowledged would not bind the Bush administra-

tion, Israel's position on Jerusalem has been significantly weakened and is in much need of rehabilitation. The Clinton proposal, which calls for division of Jerusalem's Old City, and transfer the Temple Mount to Palestinian control, is opposed by the majority of the Israeli people and has been ruled completely unacceptable by Israel's Chief Rabbi. It should be noted that other elements of the Clinton proposal, such as transfer of the Jordan Valley, have drawn severe criticism from members of the Israeli security establishment as posing a severe danger to Israeli security and regional stability. What is worse is that the Clinton proposal has given the Palestinians an unrealistic expectation that they will receive even more than what has already been offered.

Moreover, this unrealistic expectation is exacerbated by the perception, in the Arab world, that the Bush administration will be even more sympathetic to Palestinian positions. This misconception could lead to dangerous miscalculations, with potentially dangerous consequences, and should be remedied.

So long as America encourages Israel to engage in a policy of appeasement, there can never be long-term stability in the Middle East. Each Israeli concession merely increases the appetite of its enemies. This process will inevitably lead to a scenario where Israel is unable to give any further and its foes will respond with escalated violence. In a world of Weapons of Mass Destruction proliferation, America can not afford to re-learn the lessons of World War II concerning appeasement of hostile regimes.

U.S. Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and immediate movement of the American Embassy to the western part of the city, will force the Palestinians to revise their expectations. Nevertheless, it will still leave room for a Palestinian presence in the Eastern part of the city, if an agreement can be reached which is not opposed by the Israeli people and does not jeopardize Israel's security or national interests.

This policy is entirely consistent with President Bush's statement that "[his] support for Israel is not conditional on the outcome of the peace process. \* \* \* And Israel's adversaries should know that in [his] administration, the special relationship will continue even if they cannot bring themselves to make true peace with the Jewish State."

#### TIMING CONSIDERATIONS

With negotiations deadlocked and a new administration taking root in Washington, the appropriate time to officially recognize Jerusalem and move the U.S. Embassy has come. The fragility of the Oslo process is no longer a deterrent to such a move in that many of the remaining issues have revealed themselves to be intractable.

Opponents of the immediate recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the relocation of the American Embassy generally argue that the appropriate time for the move would be within the context of a final status agreement. While this thinking may have been tenable before the outbreak of the current violence, when peace seemed an imminent possibility, it has little credibility in the current situation.

Initially, this argument relies on the premise that there will be an agreement in the near future. Given the fact that the Palestinians are unwilling to compromise on key issues, shamelessly fabricate blood-lies before the international community, and continue to inculcate anti-Israel sentiment in the media and schools, a final settlement could be generations away. Moreover, leaders throughout the Arab world have made very clear statements that there never will be peace without full Israeli recognition of the

Palestinian "Right of Return." (The "right" for the four million descendants of Arabs, who fled Israel in 1948 to make way for advancing Arab armies, to resettle within Israel proper, despite the creation of a neighboring Palestinian homeland.) Given the fact that such a recognition would mean demographic suicide for Israel, as a Jewish state, the perpetual call for Israel to accede to such a recognition, is little more than a politically correct euphemism for the old refrain of "Death to Israel."

In the current environment, any further delay in recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving the embassy would simply reward Arafat for his intransigence. If the U.S. allows Arafat to set the American timetable and agenda, America's esteem is greatly diminished and its strategic interests are harmed.

Secondly, many argue that the relocation should only occur upon reaching a final agreement in order to avoid offending Arab sentiment. It is true that the Palestinians and neighboring Arab states will likely respond negatively. Such is the natural consequence of having faulty expectations shattered. Given the fact that the far-reaching concessions asked of Israel, in the Clinton proposal, were viewed by the Arab world as decidedly pro-Israel, any action which the United States takes in furtherance of its strategic relationship with Israel will always be condemned by the Arab world. They simply have not accepted Israel's right to exist. Moving the embassy will demonstrate the U.S. determination to support Israel's existence in the face of regional hostility. Failure to relocate the embassy only perpetuates unachievable expectations that make violent conflict all the more likely.

The Presidential Study Group recently concluded that America's ties with Arab states should not be dependent on avoiding pro-Israel positions, but rather;

America is the country with which the large majority of regional states will still wish to have close political, economic, and military ties. Maintaining a strong alliance with Israel has not stopped Arab Gulf states from welcoming the United States as their defender against potential subregional hegemony. Similarly, it has not prevented every state on Israel's border, except Syria, from accepting America as a major, if not the principal source of military aid and material. Indeed, the very closeness and solidity of U.S.-Arab ties is a reason why some Arab leaders and spokespersons can afford to use license in their rhetoric.

Finally, many of those who argue that a relocation of the embassy should not occur at this time subscribe to the notion that America should use its political capital with Israel to nurture Israel's willingness to engage in further negotiations and concessions. Not only does this directly contradict the approach suggested by the Presidential Study Group, but it also directly opposes President Bush's own statements that his support would not be conditional on the peace process.

#### CONCLUSION

We are at a critical time of transition for America, Israel, and the entire region. The Middle East, and perhaps the entire world, may be confronted with a situation with devastating potential. President Bush is just beginning his administration. He possesses the opportunity to make an eventful decision that will not only contribute to the advancement of his political agenda but will reinforce vital American interests in the region by contributing to stability through the promotion of more realistic Arab expectations.

The relocation of the embassy enjoys strong bi-partisan support. It will contribute